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ABSTRACT

Using the Delphi technique, a nationwide panel of experts identified 33 competencies that volunteer administrators (VAs) will need during the next decade and categorized them into these five constructs: organizational leadership; systems leadership; organizational culture; personal skills; and management skills. Twelve barriers to acquiring the competencies and 20 methods for motivating VAs and removing barriers were also identified. The following recommendations for organizations utilizing volunteers to achieve their missions were also made: (1) they should seek employees for volunteer management positions with the necessary competencies in volunteer administration; (2) they should make the acquisition of these competencies a part of the employee's performance expectations; (3) they should redirect resources to assist VAs in acquiring the competencies; and (4) they should examine their organizational culture to determine if the barriers identified in this study are preventing employees from acquiring the needed competencies in volunteer administration. (The document includes 3 tables and 19 references.) (MO)

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Competencies for Leaders of Volunteers During the Next Decade: A National Delphi Study

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Abstract

More than 109 million Americans volunteered for nonprofit organizations in 1998, carrying out almost one-third of the organization's work. More than 624,000 volunteers assist the Cooperative Extension system in carrying out its 4-H and youth development program alone. Volunteer activities are largely directed by professionals within these organizations. A nation-wide Delphi study was conducted to identify the competencies that will be required by volunteer administrators (VAs) during the next decade. The study also sought to identify barriers that prevent VAs from acquiring such competencies and how those barriers may be eliminated. Thirty-three competencies were identified by a panel of thirteen experts in the field of volunteer administration and categorized into the following five constructs: organizational leadership, systems leadership, organizational culture, personal skills, and management skills. Twelve barriers to acquiring the competencies were identified by the panel, as well as 21 methods for addressing those barriers and motivating volunteer administrators. It is recommended that organizations, especially Cooperative Extension, seek employees with the required competencies or provide resources and opportunities to acquire them. Creating an organizational culture that values the contributions of volunteers and the role of the VA is also recommended.

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Introduction/Theoretical Framework

As singer Bob Dylan wrote, "The times, they are a changin'." Because of advances in technology, this seems more true today than it was when Dylan sang those lyrics 40 years ago. This is especially true in the field of volunteerism and volunteer management. Sue Vinyard, a noted author and speaker on leading volunteers, states:

> The volunteer coordinator of the next century will have to command a broader and broader range of expertise to be able to meet the challenges of leading volunteer efforts within organizations. Far deeper than knowing how to plan, organize, staff, direct, control, and reward, the Volunteer Program Executive will have to move far beyond these basic functions of management to embrace techniques and strategies that are both complex and interdependent. (Vinyard, 1993, p.129).

Why is volunteer administration (VA) such an important issue? Look at the state of volunteerism in the United States today. The Independent Sector (2002) estimates that in 1998, more than 109 million Americans volunteered for nonprofit organizations and human service agencies, a 17% increase over 1995. These volunteers accounted for an estimated $225 billion dollars of services to these organizations, the equivalent of over 9 million full-time employees. More than 80% of nonprofit organizations in the U.S. rely on volunteers to accomplish almost one-third of their work (Ericksen-Mendoza & Heffron, 1998).

Volunteers alone cannot improve their communities. Volunteers need the direction of volunteer administrators who can focus their efforts toward solving specific problems. Job descriptions of volunteer administrators typically include the recruiting, screening, training, and recognition of volunteers for an organization (Conners, 1995). In addition, volunteer administrators must assess the need for volunteers within their organization and serve as a volunteer management "consultant" to other employees in the agency who utilized volunteers.

Fisher and Cole noted that most volunteer administrators are initiated into the profession through on-the-job or previous volunteer experience (1993). Few have formal advanced training in the administration of volunteer programs, management, or personnel experience. In fact, a study of the membership of the Association of Volunteer Administrators in 2000 discovered that 77.8% of volunteer administrators surveyed had received no formal training in volunteer administration prior to their first job experience as a volunteer administrator (Brudney & Schmahl, 2002). More than 26% of the members responding stated that at the time of the survey, they still had not completed any formal training in volunteer administration. About 25% had taken some college courses or completed university certificate programs. Almost 65% had taken some non-university courses and 10.6% had a non-university certificate in volunteer administration.

While volunteer administration as a profession has existed since the 1960s, it has been a continually emerging profession (Fisher & Cole, 1993). As with other emerging professions, volunteer administration continues to grapple with a precise description of its knowledge base. As the need for and use of volunteers continues to grow, what will volunteer administrators need to know?

Vinyard states that the volunteer manager of the future will need to do more than just manage volunteers; she will need to empower the entire organization around her to be the best they can be (1993). She emphasizes that volunteer managers will have to manage their time to include the acquisition and assimilation of new knowledge. This may include reading extensively, attending seminars, or enrolling in graduate courses. Volunteer administrators must also be adept at transferring this information to the information users via appropriate communication methods. The VA of the future must be adept at watching trends that may affect how they do business in the future. In addition, volunteer administrators must be adept at creating and maintaining a supportive, ethical, friendly and productive climate for volunteers and paid staff.

Volunteers play an essential role in the delivery of educational programs conducted by the Cooperative Extension program in the United States. In the area of 4-H and youth development alone, more than 624,000 volunteers (National 4-H Headquarters, 2002) deliver educational programs to our nation's youth each year. In other areas of Extension, master volunteers deliver educational programs in such diverse areas as gardening, natural resources, parenting, clothing, and food preservation (USDA, 2002). Volunteers are used extensively in every program area of Extension. This makes every county-level extension agent a manager or administrator of volunteers.

Because of this, many state extension programs have included skills in the management of volunteers in their list of competencies that faculty must possess or acquire in order to be successful as county extension educators (Stone & Coppernol, 2002; North Carolina Cooperative Extension, 2002).

The Association for Volunteer Administration (AVA) established a set of competency-based standards for the certification of volunteer administrators in the 1980s. Those standards were examined and revised during the late 1990s. These standards center around five functional areas: commitment to the profession; planning and conceptual design; resource development and management; accountability; and perspective and responsiveness. (AVA, 2002). The AVA describes commitment to the profession as engaging in ethical practices and theories of leadership. Planning and conceptual design involves having knowledge of the organization and the strategic and operational planning process. Resource development and management includes the management practices that involve recruiting, training, monitoring and evaluating volunteers. Risk management and financial resource management are also included in this category. The accounting category includes program evaluation and reporting to stakeholders. Relationships with volunteers, organizational staff, strategic partners, and the public are vital to volunteer organizations. Nurturing these relationships along with skills in cultural competence are part of the perspective and responsiveness competency.

The question remains, are these competencies adequate for the volunteer administrator in the decade to come?

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to develop consensus among a panel of experts regarding the competencies that would be required by volunteer administrators in the year 2010. The specific objectives were to:

1. define the competencies required by volunteer administrators in the next 10 years;
2. identify barriers that might prevent volunteer administrators from acquiring those competencies; and
3. identify ways that organizations might motivate employees to acquire these competencies or eliminate barriers.

Methods/Procedures

This study used the Delphi technique for developing group consensus. The Delphi technique was first developed by the Rand Corporation in the 1950s. It is a technique primarily used for forecasting, policy investigations, and goal-setting (Ulschak, 1983). While the majority of its use in Agricultural Education research has been in the area of curriculum development, it has also been widely used to determine essential competencies in many fields (Martin & Frick, 1998; Shinn & Smith, 1999). The Delphi technique uses a panel of experts in a given field to develop consensus regarding the answer to a specific question or series of questions.

This study involved three rounds to achieve consensus among thirteen experts in volunteer administration. The panel of experts consisted of volunteer administrators, directors of regional volunteer centers, Extension volunteer development specialists, and university faculty members from across the nation. These experts were identified by their reputation among volunteer administrators, their involvement in the profession, or their research and publication record in the field.

Round I – The initial round required the jury of experts to respond to three open-ended questions. The jury was asked to identify three to five competencies that they believed volunteer administrators will need in the year 2010. A competency was identified as a knowledge, skill, motive or characteristic that causes or predicts outstanding performance. They were next asked to identify any barriers that they perceived would prevent volunteer administrators from achieving these competencies. A barrier was defined as anything that impedes the acquisition of these competencies. And finally, the jury was asked to identify ways for organizations to motivate (both intrinsically and extrinsically) volunteer administrators to acquire these competencies or overcome any barriers. Fifteen of the original 20 members of the jury responded to the first round for a response rate of seventy-five percent. Dalky (1969) found that when the size of the jury was greater than 13, mean correlations were greater than 0.80, satisfying questions of process reliability.

Round II – Faculty members with experience in volunteer administration examined the statements identified in Round I to find commonalities among them and to combine similar statements. The original language of the expert jury members was retained without trying to clarify or interpret meaning. Combining similar statements resulted in 33 competency statements, 15 barrier statements, and 21 statements regarding motivation. These statements were used to create the instrument for Round 2. In Round 2, the jury was asked to rate their strength of agreement for each statement on a six-point Likert-type scale with 1= strongly

disagree and 6=strongly agree. All fifteen members of the jury who responded in Round I also responded to Round II.

Round III – The purpose of Round 3 was to begin the process of developing consensus among the jury. Those statements that received a five or six (agree or strongly agree) from at least two-thirds of the jury responding in Round II were kept for the third round. Jury members were sent a third revised instrument and asked to re-evaluate each statement retained from the second round using a six-point Likert-type scale. Thirteen of the fifteen jury members responded to this round. Dillman's Tailored Design Method (2000) was used for non-response follow-up. Frequency distributions were again used to select responses based on a two-thirds majority.

Findings

Competencies

In Round I, the expert jury originated 72 competency statements, 33 barrier statements, and 42 statements regarding how to motivate volunteer administrators to attain those competencies. Combining similar statements resulted in the formation of 33 competencies required by volunteer administrators in the year 2010. Group consensus was reached by the third round and all 33 competency statements were retained.

The resulting statements were subjected to an unstructured Q-sorting procedure. Kerlinger (1986) describes an unstructured Q-sort as "a set of items assembled without specific regard to the variables or factors underlying the items" (p. 511). The Q-sorting procedure resulted in the development of five constructs. The constructs and their accompanying statements may be found in Table 1.

Table 1. *Core Competencies Required by Volunteer Administrators in the coming Decade.*

Organizational Leadership

- Commitment to the vision of the organization.
- The ability to access the needs of clients, the community, volunteers, and the organization.
- Long-range strategic planning skills.
- Articulation of volunteer efforts and accomplishments.
- Short-range skills in planning and organizing.
- The ability to turn needs into plans and plans into action.
- Articulation of organizational vision to stakeholders and others.
- The creative use of technology to effect program impact.

Systems Leadership

- Understanding the system in which you operate.
- Shared leadership – shifting the mantel of leadership to others when the task calls for specific expertise.
- Understanding and utilizing group dynamics, personality type, and team building strategies.
- Willingness to share power and give up control.
- Collaborating with others.

Organizational Culture

- Acting as an internal consultant on volunteer management within the organization.
- Creating a positive environment in which volunteers can learn and operate.
- Relationship skills – the ability to motivate and work with others effectively.
- Inspiring commitment and eagerness to learn by volunteers.
- Trusting volunteers to get the job done.
- Positive attitude and energy – seeking success and helping others.

Personal Skills

- People skills: The development of the total person.
- Good conflict resolution skills.
- Communication skills: verbal, non-verbal, listening.
- Creative thinking to accomplish goals and meet growing demands.
- Ability to predict and manage change.

Management Skills

- Understanding the functions and operationalization of an effective advisory system for volunteers.
- Competent in recruiting volunteers.
- Competent in screening volunteers.
- Competent in matching volunteers to agency needs.
- Competent in orienting and training volunteers.
- Competent in protecting volunteers, clients, and the organization.
- Competent in evaluating volunteer efforts and accomplishments.
- Competent in recognizing volunteers.
- Competent in retaining volunteers.

Competencies falling under the *organizational leadership* heading include skills in planning and needs assessment, a commitment to and communication of the organization's mission and vision to volunteers, clientele, and the general public. *Systems leadership* competencies involve understanding the agency's organizational system, and sharing leadership and power within the organization through delegation and collaboration. It also involves understanding others and the ability to build and sustain teams to more effectively address problems. Competencies identified under *organizational culture* include helping others within the organization understand the philosophy of volunteerism and how volunteers contribute to the mission of the organization. Creating an atmosphere of trust between employees and volunteers, and the ability to inspire and motivate volunteers through a well-communicated vision are also essential. The *personal skills* category not only includes skills that build better relationships with volunteers, but also the ability to creatively solve problems, and predict and manage change. *Management skills* include those functions necessary to creating and maintaining a volunteer program: recruiting, screening, training, recognizing and evaluating volunteers.

Barriers that discourage volunteer administrators from acquiring core competencies

The original 33 barriers identified during Round 1 were reduced to 15 in Round II. Consensus was reached on twelve of those barriers by the third round. These barriers are listed in Table 2.

Table 2. *Barriers that Discourage Volunteer Administrators from Acquiring Core Competencies in Volunteer Administration.*

Barriers
Lack of organizational commitment/support to volunteers
Volunteer administrator has too many other responsibilities other than volunteer administration
Volunteer administrator lacks a personal philosophy of volunteerism
Unwillingness of volunteer administrator to learn or change
Lack of basic understanding of volunteer systems and the drivers of those systems
Lack of pre-service or in-service training for volunteer administrators
Lack of knowledge of volunteer management skills needed
Lack of importance given to the role of volunteer administrator
Organizational hiring practices
Lack of access to necessary training/education to acquire the competencies
Other professionals in the agency are threatened by volunteers
An organization that doesn't foster a positive environment for the development of the individual

Many of the barriers identified deal with organizational cultures where the use of volunteers to achieve the organization's mission isn't valued. This can be attributed both to the organization's culture and the volunteer coordinator's commitment to the job assignment. Lack of knowledge on the part of the volunteer administrator is also a barrier. How can volunteer administrators seek skills that they don't realize they need?

When asked to identify ways to motivate volunteer administrators to develop these competencies and remove any barriers, the panel identified 21 methods. The panel retained 20 of those methods through the third round. These statements are listed in Table 3.

Table 3. *Motivation Factors and Management Practices to Encourage the Attainment of Volunteer Administration Competencies.*

Motivating Factors
Require adequate pre-service training before hiring volunteer coordinator
Require additional training as part of the job requirement and performance Review
Recognize the importance of volunteer contributions to the agency's Mission
Acknowledging and rewarding volunteer administrators for attaining the competencies
Including the volunteer administrator in key decision-making and management meetings
Recognizing the professionalism of the volunteer coordinator position both internally and externally to the organization.
Expressing how management skills learned related to volunteer management are transferable to other jobs and personal life.
Profile success stories.
Create an environment and desire for life-long learning.
Removing Barriers
Orienting volunteer administrators as to the complexity of the position.
Organization provides appropriate levels of guidance and support.
Organization reimburses staff for training/professional development.
Refocus positions to focus only on volunteer administration.
Offering graduate courses in volunteer administration.
Making sure volunteer program's goals and activities support the organizational mission/vision.
Allow flexible work schedules and official time to obtain needed training.
Realistically advertising for the required knowledge, skills and attitudes.
Providing access to professional development materials in volunteer administration.
Making technology and applications accessible to help volunteer administrators do their job.
Offer an exciting array of professional development opportunities.

Organizational culture is implicated in both motivating volunteer administrators to acquire the competencies and in removing barriers to their attainment. Recognizing the importance of volunteer contributions to the agency's mission, acknowledging and rewarding volunteer administrators for acquiring the competencies, and recognizing the professionalism of the volunteer coordinator position both internally and externally to the organization all require an organizational culture that values the contributions of volunteers.

Conclusions and Implications

In their study to identify trends that will affect volunteer leadership in the next ten years, Culp and Nolan (1999) identified the volunteer administrator's professional development as the second most critical trend. The implications are clear: organizations that depend on volunteers to carry out their mission, such as the Cooperative Extension system, must either hire volunteer administrators with these competencies or make opportunities and resources available for volunteer administrators to acquire them. The agricultural education system can play a vital role in helping extension educators acquire these competencies, either through traditional classroom experiences or via web-based curriculums.

The competencies identified under the constructs of Organizational Leadership and Management Skills mirror the AVA competencies for Planning and Conceptual Design, Resource Development & Management, and Accountability. Under the competency category Commitment to the Profession, AVA lists theories of leadership as a knowledge base that volunteer administrators should possess. The Systems Leadership Competencies could potentially fit under this category, but the AVA category is too vague to make that connection. However, the AVA categories do not address the competencies identified under the Organizational Culture and Personal Skills constructs. Developing a culture that encourages and motivates volunteers, provides for their development, and rewards salaried staff for working with volunteers is crucial to the success of any volunteer program.

The study identified several ways that volunteer administrators can be motivated to acquire these competencies. While requiring adequate pre-service training and recognizing volunteer administrators for attaining the required competencies are easily implemented management practices, the other motivating factors identified in this study may require a change in the agency's organizational culture. Recognizing the professionalism of the volunteer administrator position, including the volunteer administrator in the decision-making process, and creating an atmosphere that encourages life-long learning are factors that cannot be changed overnight. Edgar Schein, in his book, Organizational Culture and Leadership, states that it is the prime task of the leader to manage the organizational culture (1996).

Multiple barriers may impede volunteer administrators from attaining these competencies. Strategic direction from the organizational leadership will be required to eliminate such barriers. Reallocating resources, aligning the volunteer mission with that of the organization, and redefining the volunteer administrator position to focus only on the volunteer program will greatly enhance the volunteer administrator's ability to attain the required competencies.

Recommendations

The following are recommendations for the agricultural education system:

1. Create undergraduate or graduate courses to prepare graduates to effectively lead volunteers (both synchronous and asynchronous delivery).
2. Prepare web-based faculty development materials to help school-based and extension faculty fill-in gaps in volunteer management competencies.

The following are recommendations for organizations utilizing volunteers to achieve their mission, including Cooperative Extension and the public education system:

1. Organizations should seek employees for volunteer management positions with the necessary competencies in volunteer administration;
2. Organizations should make the acquisition of these competencies a part of the employee's performance expectations.
3. Organizations should redirect resources to assist volunteer administrators in acquiring the competencies, including providing educational materials, professional development time, and reimbursement for professional development expenses related to acquiring the competencies; and
4. Organizations should examine their organizational culture to determine if any of the barriers identified in this study are preventing employees from acquiring the needed competencies in volunteer administration.

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